

# Operationalizing Information Engagement

by  
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**Editor's Note:** Like LTC Zimmerman's contribution, MAJ Obidinski in this article highlights the importance of "Engagement" in the conduct of military operations at the tactical level where actual contact is made. MAJ Obidinski and LTC Zimmerman were both serving in MND-B during the same time frame. Both of the submissions provide valued lessons learned for the IO professional.

*Over time, if you build networks of trust, these will grow like roots into the population, displacing the enemy's networks, bringing them out into the open to fight you, and seizing the initiative. These networks include local allies, community leaders, local security forces...in your area.<sup>1</sup>*

LTC David Kilcullen, "Twenty-Eight Articles," *Military Review* (May-June 2006)

When the 4th Infantry Division Headquarters assumed responsibility of Multi-National Division Baghdad (MND-B) in December 2007, we quickly realized that we were fighting a war of perceptions in the Baghdad theater of public opinion at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. From late Spring of 2008 through the beginning of 2009, the conditions within the MND-B operational

environment (OE) significantly changed as security visibly improved.<sup>2</sup> Improved security conditions created the maneuver room for the MND-B's non-lethal warriors. Despite significant improvements in security, MND-B identified a significant lag in the perceptions of these security improvements within the Baghdad population. The Baghdad populace's awareness of these improvements lagged because of the following: Government of Iraq (GOI) gaps in providing sustained essential services, ineffective coordination and synchronization of civil capacity efforts among various coalition force (CF) and GOI partners, and a lack of synchronized, concerted information operation efforts by CF and GOI to inform the local populace of security, civil capacity, and quality of life gains.

MND-B's challenge was to close this perception gap in order to leverage actual gains in security within the Baghdad OE. LTC Kilcullen's, "Twenty-Eight Articles" focuses on the tactical level. MND-B elevated Kilcullen's observation to the operational and strategic levels of war by identifying key security, religious, tribal, and government influence-enabling networks. MND-B's operationalization of information engagement (IE) was a key combat multiplier that empowered CF to identify Iraqi actors to engage at the right time and



MAJ Therese L. Obidinski, MND-B G7 Engagements Planner, shows local Iraqi girl picture of her daughter during a key leader engagement. Source: MAJ Therese Obidinski

place to resolve issues and progress civil capacity building and security efforts across the OE – a shift to non-lethal network-based targeting. Ultimately, MND-B's ability to synchronize both lethal and non-lethal efforts of CF and host nation actors closed this perception gap and enabled CF to leverage actual gains in security within the Baghdad OE.

As the GOI and Baghdad citizens struggled to support and govern themselves, insurgents, terrorists, and disenfranchised groups continuously exploited these perception gaps through harassing vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and suicide vest (SVES) attacks amplified through aggressive tactical and strategic propaganda campaigns designed to do the following: discredit the Iraqi government and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF); degrade local Iraqi support for CF, ISF and GOI; reinforce negative local perception; maintain passive support of the local Iraqi populace, and lastly, to degrade the will and support of the American people.

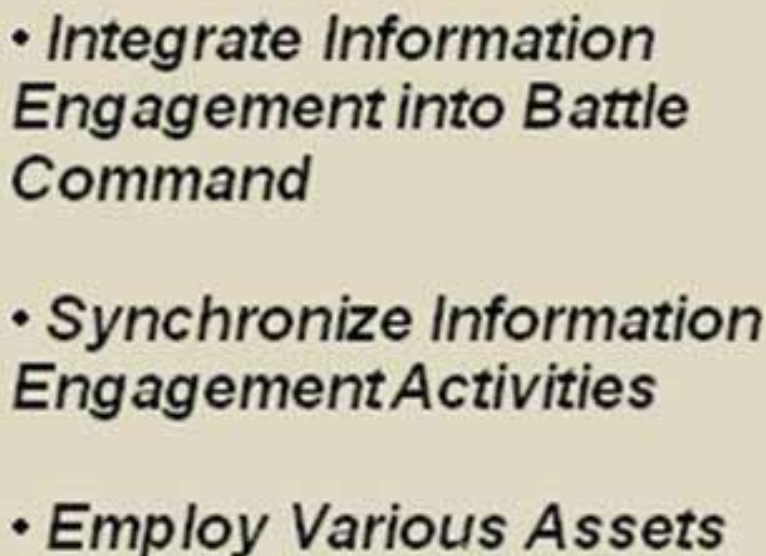
While current doctrine still focused on fighting adversaries with vertically organized command and control structures, this was not the case in the current COIN fight which required friendly forces to fight against adversaries with more flexible, informal command and control elements who used non-standard tactics.<sup>3</sup> In order to successfully "fight" against these atypical adversaries, MND-B would now have to equally apply the network-based approach to lethal and non-lethal targeting across all lines of effort (LOE). MND-B's execution of Information Operations (IO), in concert with other lethal and non-lethal means, played a key role in this fight to influence the behaviors of the Iraqi people to cause small, steady gains in behavior change, which over time shaped perception and attitudes. This is where the Army IO subtask of information engagement took center stage. The G7 staff enabled the MND-B Commander, Major General Jeffrey Hammond, to shape Iraqi perceptions and behavior by: 1) integrating IE fully into the operations process and directly

assisting the CG in exercising battle command, 2) synchronizing IE activities, and 3) employing various assets to achieve the commander's desired effects of sustained security, improved essential services, and progress civil capacity building.

**Integrate Information Engagement into Battle Command** as described in Army Field Manual 3-0, Operations, defines IE as "the integrated employment of public affairs to inform U.S. and friendly audiences; psychological operations, combat camera, U.S. Government strategic communication and defense support to public diplomacy, and other means necessary to influence foreign audiences; and, leader and Soldier engagements to support both efforts."<sup>4</sup> To accomplish this, the G7 ensured both IO and IE activities were fully integrated into the operations process and directly assisted the CG in exercising battle command. For example, the G7 ensured that the G7 staff leads were fully integrated into the military decision making process. G7

engagement, targeting, plans, military deception, psychological operations, and cultural and policy advisor staff leads attended division staff operational planning groups, IO working groups (IOWG), lethal targeting meetings, and other lethal and non-lethal battle rhythm events to facilitate staff coordination, de-confliction, and synchronization of all operations.

When 4th ID began participation in the weekly Sewer Water Electricity Agriculture Trash and Health (SWEAT-H) meetings led by the G9, there was insufficient coordination among the various MND-B partners such as Iraqi Amanat or city hall representatives, USAID, Provincial Reconstruction Team-Baghdad (PRT-B), Joint Reconstruction Operations Center (JROC), Engineer, Civil Affairs (CA) unit representatives, Staff Judge Advocate (SJA), G8, G9, and Public Affairs (PA) division staff leads, and Human Terrain Team (HTT) leads from identifying, prioritizing, synchronizing and executing essential service projects. Over the course of

- 
- *Integrate Information Engagement into Battle Command*
  - *Synchronize Information Engagement Activities*
  - *Employ Various Assets*

time we learned that CF needed to improve coordination and communication through engagements with the Baghdad mayor, PRT-B, JROC, and other GOI ministries. CF partnered with the Amanat and Baghdad Governorate and PRT-B to sign the project's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which laid the framework for Amanat project specifications, identification, and prioritization. The door was now opened for more Iraqi representation and coordination at the SWEAT-H.

No project in the MND-B OE would be started without Amanat buy-in or approval, the ultimate example of partnership. G7 planners also attended the lethal/non-lethal working groups to prevent information fratricide and to synchronize and coordinate lethal and non-lethal targeting and messages across the OE. The G7 briefed the Commanding General (CG) in the daily Battle Update Assessment (BUA) brief, another key battle rhythm event. The culmination of G7 integration within the division staff occurred at the weekly lethal/non-lethal targeting brief chaired by the CG with the attendance of DCG-M, DCG-S, and the chief of PRT-B; thus, enabled the commander to make informed and timely decisions.

**Synchronize Information Engagement Activities** vertically and horizontally among the division, brigade, and allied partner staff leads to ensure words match deeds. Messaging must be tied to operations on the ground and

directed to the right target at the right time and right place. The infamous Route Irish which used to be laden with IEDs is one such example of how this was accomplished. Route Irish is the main route into Baghdad City. The main trash covered route to Baghdad deteriorated in recent years structurally and posed a potential security concern. It was common practice for the enemy to bury IEDs underneath trash and debris. The project's MoU facilitated the synchronization between MND-B and the Amanat to address this issue and to start a revitalization and public information campaign of partnered GOI and CF activities to restore Route Irish to its former glory. Joint Iraqi and CF press conferences with the Iraqis in the lead were broadcast to American and Arab audiences highlighting GOI and CF efforts to renovate and restore the route. This created public awareness of visibly, improving conditions and helped to promote the GOI's credibility and competency for providing for a better quality of life directed toward American and Iraqi publics. Thus, the partnering of GOI, ISF, and CF efforts helped to close the gap between perceptions and reality.

**Employ various assets** such as public affairs (PA), psychological operations (PSYOP), and engagements to inject messages into the populace. Operation Ironhorse Blizzard, which lasted from 25 August to 30 November 2008, is one such example of G7 support to transmit well-timed, synchronized, and coordinated messages to the Iraqi populace within the

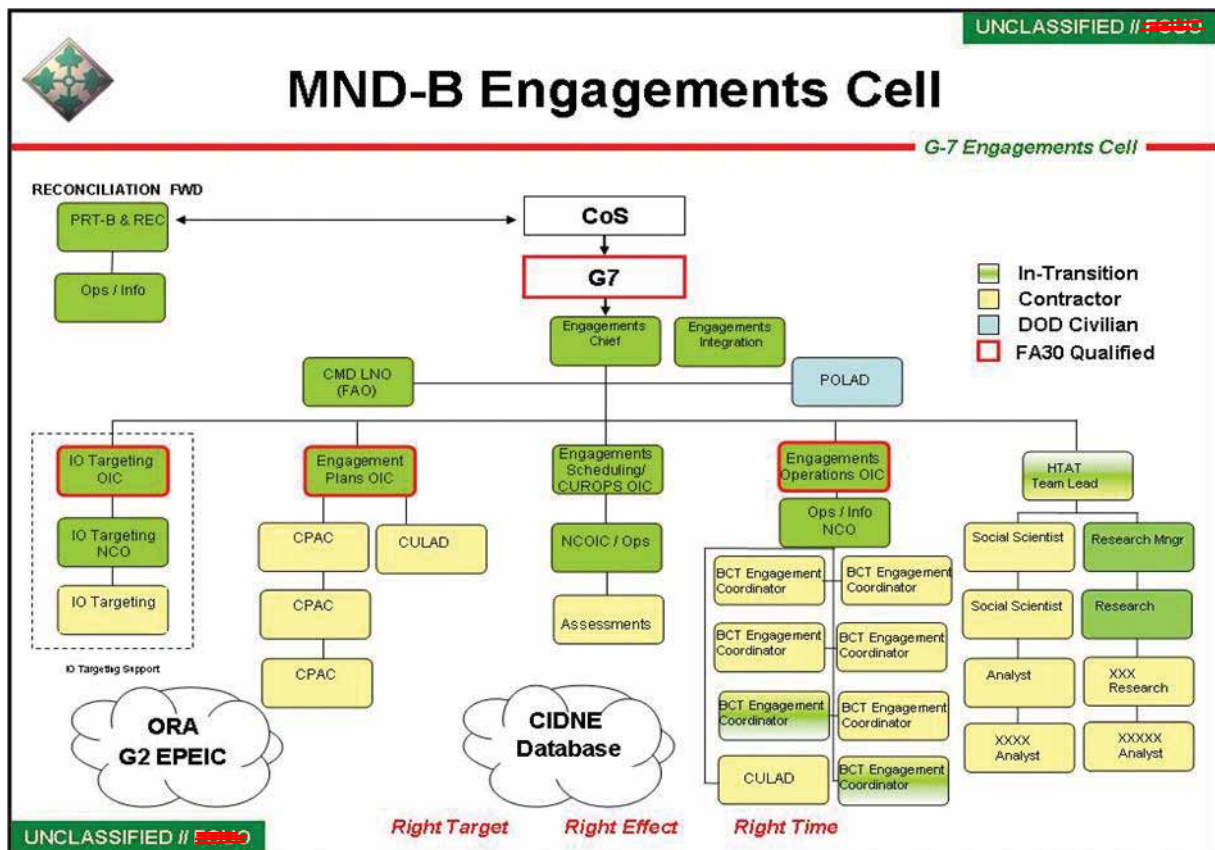


Figure 1 - MND-B Key Leader Engagement Cell  
Source: MAJ Therese Obidinski



Baghdad OE. This operation served as another partnered Iraqi and CF campaign to prevent the return of Jaysh al-Mahdi Army and other special group criminals (JAM SGC) to their operating bases within the city by flooding the information environment with messages about JAM SGC return. Arab media outlets, joint CF and Iraqi press conferences, Arab newspapers, radio, tri-folds, leaflets, billboards, bedsheet banners,<sup>5</sup> and face to face engagements were all conduits of the message to inform the populace of JAM SGC return, influence the populace to report JAM SGC activities to the ISF, and ultimately, deny JAM SGC from returning. A thorough analysis of the information environment to determine 2nd and 3rd order effects within the MND-B OE enabled G7 engagements to determine the best methods to ensure message delivery and acceptance by the target audience. Constant assessment and various

perception atmospheric methods are necessary to determine measures of effectiveness (MOE) of message injects into the populace. As an example, do not overuse any one asset, such as leaflets, as it can lose its effectiveness. MND-B utilized the Baghdad Survey and Iraqi Advisory Task Force (IQATF) to measure citizen perceptions of this operation and other issues such as SWEAT-H efforts, the GOI, and ISF in order to determine the effectiveness of CF and IA message delivery methods.<sup>6</sup> MND-B also utilized engagement reports and intelligence reports to create MOEs. Lastly, always remember that not every event requires a response.

### Role of MND-B Key Leader Engagement Cell

Due to the unique spheres of influence in MND-B, the division developed and organized the most robust, unique key leader engagement cell in the Army

(See Figure 1). The engagement cell's distinctive mission and organization enabled it to do the following: codify the engagement development process, conduct targeted, sequenced engagements across the OE in support of the commander's desired effects and lastly, required robust information sharing and knowledge management.

Mission Focus and desired end-state for all engagement operations was the reduction of violence and return to normalcy. The G7 engagement staff mission directed subordinate units to conduct full spectrum engagements in support of strategic communications in order to isolate extremists, cultivate engagement opportunities for long-term reconciliation and build credible national, provincial and local institutions. G7 engagement staff served as the synchronizing cell responsible for tiered and nested engagements at all echelons



Before and After Photos in MND-B Area of Operations  
Source: MAJ Therese Obidinski

with key tribal, religious, Iraqi security force, business and political leaders. By the completion of the 2009 Security Agreement, the Baghdad Provincial and City governments had taken over nearly all-essential service project management. Coalition Forces continued to provide oversight in an advisory or consultative capacity.

## Organization Matters

The Baghdad OE not only consisted of the urban government seat of Baghdad city, but also included the outlying rural provinces (See Figure 2). Additionally, the Multi-National Corps- Iraq (MNC-I) engagement cell was standing up their capability with limited personnel. As a result, an engagement gap existed as Multi-National Force- Iraq (MNF-I) would often cover down on what would be labeled as MNC-I level engagements. MND-B would cover up to fill this gap. Significantly more important to this unique challenge was the ability to organize the engagement cell with the quality and skills set of personnel that were required to execute engagement operations.

Coordination efforts with MNC-I and MNF-I progressed to ensure that all engagement operations were synchronized at all levels. Units were aware that spheres of influence for each echelon of leadership would overlap laterally with adjacent BCTs and also vertically with MND-B, MNC-I, and their individual battalions (See Figure 3). Force level engagements focused on the ministries, members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives (COR), and the Presidency Council while Division level engagements focused on provincial councils, ministry representatives, and tribal councils. Brigade level and below engagements focused on tribal leaders, District Advisory Councils (DACs), and Nahia or Neighborhood Advisory Councils (NACs). Subordinate units' understanding of engagement levels and spheres of influence was especially important to ensure that our information efforts would neither result in information fratricide, mismatching of words with deeds, nor what would be called engagement fatigue, over exhaustion of engagements with any one of our Iraqi counterparts and overexertion of engagements by any one member of CF.

## Engagement Development Process

The organization of the cell enabled MND-B to codify the engagement development process, using the Army's detect, decide, deliver, assess (D3A) targeting methodology (See Figure 4). Each member of the cell played a distinct role in the process to identify the right issue and match it to the right enabler to engage at the right time and place in order to achieve synchronous and planned effects in support of the Security, Partnership and Transition, and Building Civil Capacity LOEs. The end

result was the key leader engagement packet which consisted of the following: background of the issue; brief biographical and background information of individual to be engaged; assessment or baseline position of the individual and proposed talking points for the command group. Thus, a system was created that codified the engagement development process using following D3A approach of *Detect, Decide, Deliver and Assess*.

**Detect** or define the problem, issue, or need of the people. When 4th ID arrived in Baghdad in December 2007, initial engagements were designed to spread the general message that CF were here to help. Increasing pressure on the commander's time caused a shift of focus to conduct engagements that solved specific issues, moved along particular processes, and/or addressed an identified need. The questions then became to our Iraqi counterparts, how may we partner to assist? What are your issues/concerns?

**Decide** which officials, leaders, enablers and decision makers should be engaged. Through the non-lethal working group and coordination with the G2 Economic, Political, Engagement, Intelligence Cell (EPEIC), Cultural Political Advisory Cell (CPAC), and the Human Terrain Analysis Team (HTAT), we were able to develop enabling tribal, religious, governance, security networks that focused on the influence structure, or informal structure within an organization, versus the formal, organizational structure. The network based approach to targeting enabled us to determine who to engage and at which level.

**Deliver** the goods. Just as important as deciding whom to engage, it was just as important to determine which asset at the brigade, division, or higher level would deliver and execute the engagement. Only when issues could not be resolved or processes moved along at the brigade level would engagements elevate to the next level. When necessary, the trump cards would be played in the form of the DCGs and the ace in the hole, the CG when additional muscle was needed. It is important

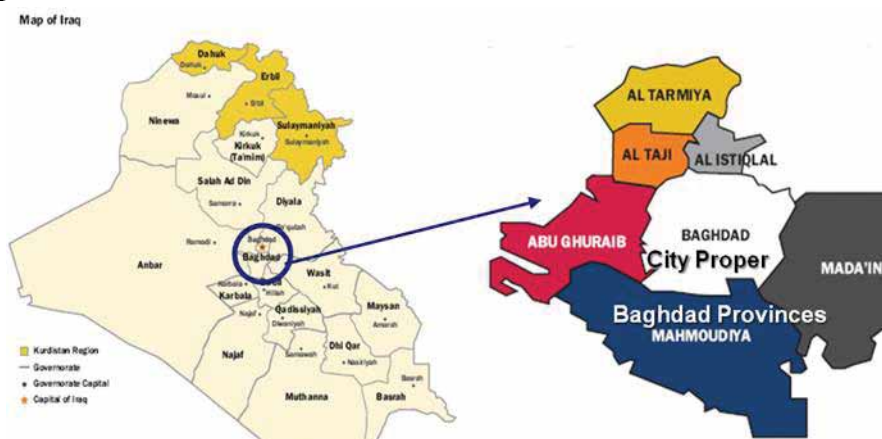


Figure 2 - Baghdad Governorate and Amanat <sup>7</sup>

Source: Republic of Iraq District Field Manual, Volume I, USAID, July 2007 with modifications from author.

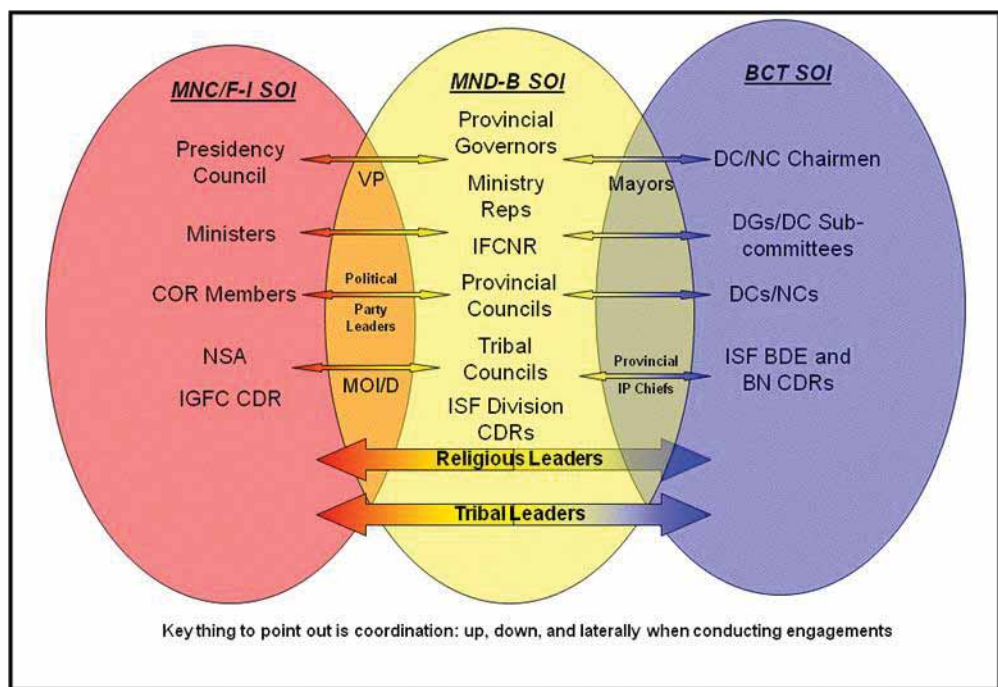


not to overplay your cards and know when to play them.

**Assess** the desired effects. The assessment portion of the process is crucial. CF utilized various assets such as the IQATF and the Baghdad Survey. In addition, the most important for the cell was the engagement summary (EXSUM) which summarized the key points of the meeting, due outs, and deliverables. All units were required to input within 72 hours of the scheduled engagement EXSUMs into the Combined Information Database Network Exchange (CIDNE). The CIDNE database, although not perfect, did not leave theater, and facilitated continuity of information on a secure network. Previously, files containing pertinent information were lost due to poor battle handover, taken home by the unit, or in diverse databases instead of compiled into one central databank. The cell could now review previous EXSUMs and linkages of individuals and determine whether they were effective or not. For each engagement, the G7 assessor, a civilian contractor, gave a rating of poor- effects not achieved do not engage to a rating of excellent- effects achieved continue to re-engage from the desired effects from the engagement packet. Once assessed, CF could determine whether or not to re-engage the individual or to move on to someone more efficient and start the engagement development process all over. From assessments, CF could now recommend to the commander whether to add or drop individuals from the High Value Engagement List (HVEL).

### Targeted, Sequenced Engagements

MND-B working groups proposed targeted, sequenced engagements across the OE in support of the commander's desired effects. Engagements were planned and synchronized at the



**Figure 3 - Spheres of Influence**  
Source: MAJ Therese Obidinski


command level with engagements by the brigades. Together they created additional maneuver room and reinforcing and primary effects that advanced our LOEs.

### Build and Share Knowledge

Engagement operations required robust information sharing and knowledge management. Previously, units who had redeployed often took their files with them. Reach-back centers in the states did not keep the same hours as CF in theater. It was often difficult to get information in a timely manner for the commander to make decisions. The CIDNE database became the crucial information exchange network. This not only would require individual staff personnel to organize and maintain section file systems, but also, would require a dedicated knowledge manager maintain the entire system of information files for the division.

As the OE and its complexities change, so will our tactics, techniques, and procedures change to ensure that we are constantly adapting our methods to achieve our desired effects and counter the enemy's actions. Engagements affect every Soldier at every level. Words and deeds do matter, and we must constantly ensure that we properly plan engagements in order to prevent information fratricide and engagement

fatigue. Just like synchronization of fires, we can mass information effects across the OE through a series of coordinated and synchronized engagements designed to match the right target with the right effect at the right time and place in order to change behavior and resolve problems. If we can accomplish this task, then we have truly made a lasting impact.

MND-B was successful in shaping Iraqi perceptions across the Baghdad OE because it equally applied the network-based approach to lethal and non lethal-targeting across all lines of effort; synchronized CF and host nation lethal and non-lethal efforts; integrated IE activities into the operations process, and lastly, was not afraid to employ various assets to achieve the desired effects of sustained security, improved essential services, and progress civil capacity building. MND-B's orchestration of both lethal and non-lethal activities closed the perception gap; thus, leveraged security gains across the Baghdad theater of public opinion at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels- making a lasting impact not only on the Iraqi people, but also on our Soldiers as well- and that has made all the difference. 

Footnotes:

1. LTC David Kilcullen et al., "Twenty-Eight Articles," *Military Review* (May-June, 2006)
2. From MND-B reported attack trends from December 2007 through December 2008. Data recorded as of 10 January 2008.
3. BG (Ret.) Huba Wass de Czege et al., "Rethinking IO: Complex Operations in the Information Age," *Military Review* (November-December, 2008): 17.
4. U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 14 June 2001), 11-2
5. *Bedsheet Banners were a preferred Baghdad local method for message delivery.*
6. *Iraqi Advisory Task Force (IQATF) Reports. Reports are an IQATF product derived from information provided by IQATF Local National Advisors (LNAs) from throughout the MND-B Area of Operations. This report attempts to assess subjects categorized under the following topics from a local national perspective: Local Government, Security, Economics, and Essential Services. This report contains raw atmospheric information as reported by the IQATF LNA's.*
7. *Republic of Iraq District Field Manual, Volume I, USAID, July 2007*

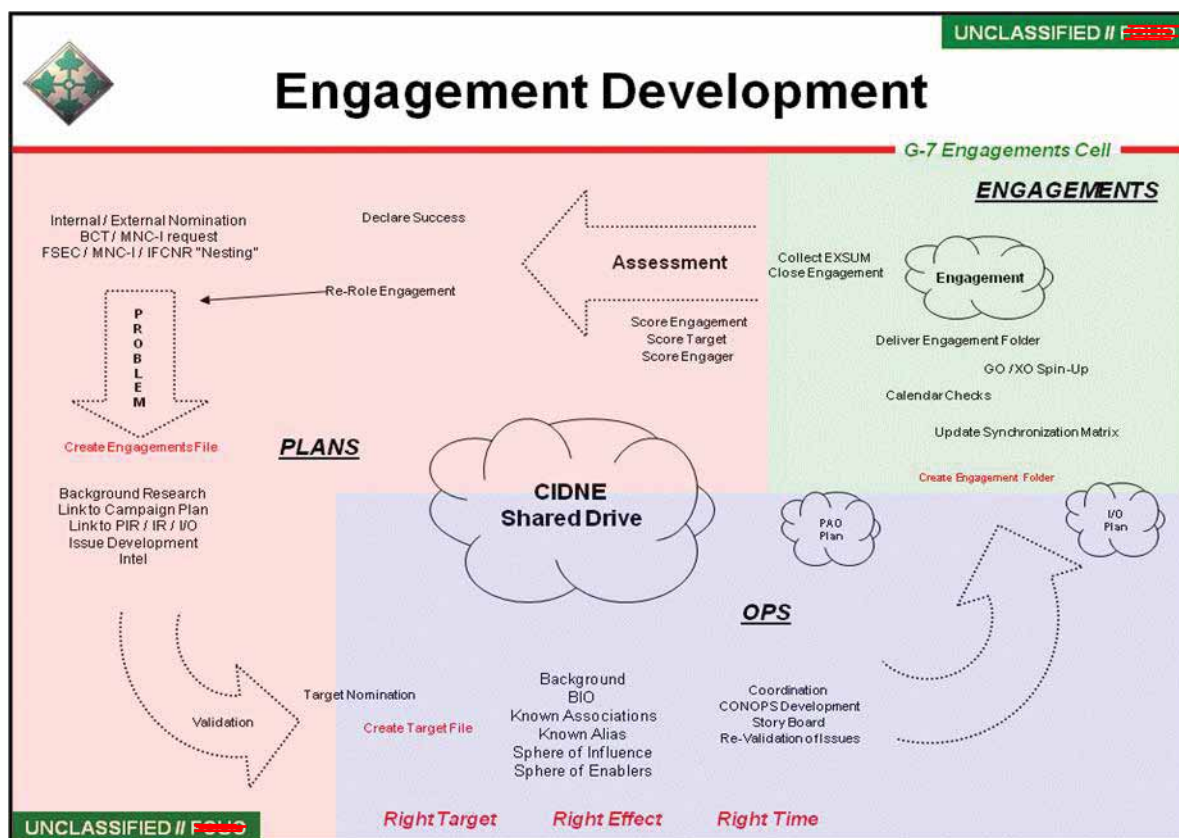


Figure 4- Engagement Development Process  
Source: MAJ Therese Obidinski